

IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNATIONAL VOCATIONAL BEST PRACTICES FOR IMPROVED EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES TO YOUTH IN POST CONFLICT ENVIRONMENT IN NORTHERN UGANDA

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Abstract

Vocational training programmes are frequently used as a means of securing economic opportunities for unemployed internally displaced youth, and ex-combatants in post-conflict affected areas. In most funded vocational training programmes in post-conflict areas, the vocational training programmes are intended for economic recovery rather than labour market linked workforce development. As a result, they often fail to deliver their intended economic outcomes. Many participants are unable to subsist or generate an income or increase skills productivity following their training because of mismatch of skills and competencies as demanded by the market.

Vocational education and skills development have been known to increase productivity of individuals, profitability of employers and expansion of economic opportunities in post conflict economy. A 'knowledgeable' workforce, one that is both highly skilled in a particular occupation that exhibits flexibility, creativity and innovativeness, is seen as the most important human capital required for the development of a conflict affected economy.

Among many policies and interventions in vocational training designed to integrate unemployed youths of post conflict areas into the labour market, the most popular interventions are skills training particularly vocational training. The inventory of such interventions needs consideration while analysing outcomes, impacts, cost and benefits of programmes and interventions. Vocational training with best practices intervention succeeds when they are innovative, make a difference, have a sustainable effect, have the potential for replication and serve as an inspiration to generate policies and initiative. These best practices have been considered effective for improved employment opportunities to youth in post-conflict environment.

Key words: vocational training, internally displaced, ex-combatants, post-conflict, mismatch of skills, intended economic outcomes, subsist, economic opportunities, workforce, interventions, best practices, sustainable effect, employment opportunities

1. Introduction

Vocational training programmes are frequently used as a means of securing economic opportunities for unemployed youth, internally displaced youth and ex-combatants in post-conflict environment including in northern Uganda. In most cases, the vocational training programmes are intended for economic recovery rather than labour market linked workforce development. As a result, they often fail to deliver their intended economic outcomes. Many participants are unable to subsist or generate an income following their training because of mismatch of skills and competencies as demanded by the labour market. UNESCO-UNEVOC states that 'assuming that the success of a programme is not measured by completion rates but rather by the number of graduates who use the skills learned to earn a living after programme end, there are not many successful training programmes

in southern Sudan.' UNESCO-UNEVOC finds that 'at the moment, graduates are frequently frustrated.'

Moberg and Johnson-Demen (2009), in their evaluation of the Norwegian Refugee Council's Youth Education Pack (YEP) project in Liberia (2006-07), which afforded vocational training to war-affected youth, assessed that 'apart from youth who have gained short-term employment with an NGO project, only a handful of youth can sustain themselves on the income from the skill learnt at YEP' and that 'this is a frustration to many.' Hanlon (2005) observes that 'too many [ex-combatants in Sierra Leone] have been trained for tailoring, tie-dying, and soap-making, when there is not a sufficient local market [for these skills].'

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reports a 'sharp disconnect between training programmes for youth and subsequent employment or income generation' throughout northern Uganda despite an 'abundance of NGO-led training

schemes.’ By way of example, IOM comments that ‘hundreds, if not thousands, of female youth underwent NGO-led vocational training in the basics of sewing, but struggled to utilize these skills to generate a primary or secondary income.

Vocational training and best practices

Vocational education and skills development have been known to increase productivity of individuals, profitability of employers and expansion of economic opportunities in post conflict economy. A ‘knowledgeable’ workforce, one that is both highly skilled in a particular occupation and also exhibits flexibility, creativity and innovativeness, is seen as the most important human capital required for the development of a conflict affected economy.

Among many policies and interventions in vocational training designed to integrate unemployed youth or other targeted groups into the labour market, the most popular interventions are skills training particularly vocational training. The inventory of such interventions needs consideration while analysing outcomes, impacts, cost and benefits of programmes and interventions. Best practices on vocational training intervention succeed when they are innovative, make a difference, have a sustainable effect and have the potential for replication and serve as an inspiration to generate policies and initiative.

Findings from the Survey of War Affected Youth¹ (SWAY) show that skills training alone cannot create livelihoods, and must be aligned with labour market needs as well as with the realities of its participants. SWAY’s findings suggest that “individuals themselves may be better judges of what skills and opportunities suit their own skill set, interests, and local demands” and that it might be more effective to provide vouchers which could be used towards NGO or private training programmes (Annan et. al., 2006).

Despite significant progress, many vocational programmes in post-conflict regions still lack effective vocational education and training (VET) strategies, and are struggling with costly and outdated training systems, and have no culture of evaluation and knowledge-based policymaking and programme administration. There are examples of best practices at different levels that are followed to manage such vocational training challenges such as leadership of the institution/industry, on-going faculty development, updating of curriculum continuously based on industry requirements; under private initiative best practices and finally

international best practices also helps in promoting close cooperation between vocational training programmes supported by international donors, government and enterprises, assisting in developing a legislative framework that requires firms to invest in training of newly hired workers; funding mechanism etc. These best practices have been considered effective for improved employment opportunities to youth in particular in post-conflict environment.

Vocational training’s skills-centric and employer-facing approach is repeatedly viewed as a solid step towards those ‘alternatives’ in conflict-affected areas. Vocational training is often a more rapid route into the workplace as compared to formal education. UNESCO-UNEVOC explain that ‘young men and women often do not have the time, due to current or future family obligations, to devote to completing a primary or secondary schooling cycle.’ Able-bodied young people also represent an enormous potential pool of labour to assist in post-conflict reconstruction.

The intended economic outcome of a vocational training programme is usually based on the specific economic circumstances of the post-conflict region. For instance, paid employment is an option in northern Uganda where there is an emerging private sector, but not so much in southern Sudan where the private sector is by and large non-existent.

Post-conflict northern Uganda and vocational training

The vocational training system is a major supplier of workforce in northern Uganda with three quarters of the total vocational graduates entering labour market each year. At present, vocational training is seen as a more certain route to employment than formal education, though preferred by most families and the youth, for non-school bound students in the post-conflict labour environment.

The standard of skills in northern Uganda is changing after the end of conflict; senior secondary education or beyond is rapidly becoming the minimum standard for formal sector employment while its contribution to productivity and growth is not satisfactory as per investment². In this context, vocational training (VT) has become a necessary complement to achieve higher productivity, lower unemployment, and sustainable growth in a post conflict northern Uganda.

A particular feature of the conflict in Northern Uganda is the wide-scale abduction and recruitment by the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) of male and female children and youth, who were forced into

¹ Survey of War Affected Youth by [Jeannie Annan](#), [Chris Blattman](#), [Khristopher Carlson](#), and [Dyan Mazurana](#).

² MTAU investment plan 2012

labour, sexual slavery and combat roles. The estimated number of young people abducted during the war is in excess of 25,000, and recent evidence suggests the number is more likely to be 60,000 or higher³. Northern Uganda holds a large proportion of the country's population which has been affected by violence and war over the last two decades. In turn, there are many latent conflicts which exist between individuals, families, ethnic groups, and between civilians and government authorities.

The 2002 Population and Housing Census revealed that 40 percent of the population in the North is less than 12 years. The condition of the education system is characterized by inadequate facilities, primary enrolment is relatively high with an average of 63.9% of the total population of school-going-age enrolled (i.e. 2,896,443 out of 3,303,257)⁴. At the next level only a small percentage (5.2 percent) of the population has completed secondary education and beyond. The pupil classroom ratio is high in all districts – over 100 pupils per classroom on average compared to the national target of 54/ classroom.

Nearly 21 percent of children dropped out of school, this being more prevalent among female (23.5 percent) than male children (17.3 percent). Drop-out rates increase with age, although the rates are higher in rural areas than urban areas and amongst the bottom 20 percent. It is estimated that only 26 percent of those who enrol for primary education graduate to secondary level. The high dropout rate in this region is attributed to the high cost of education, lack of interest, early pregnancies and early marriage among young girls, insecurity, displacement, and poor health.

The average distance from home to school is estimated at 3km for all of the sub-counties in the region. These general problems impact negatively on attendance, concentration and progression of the pupils.

Formally, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is delivered by some 29 government Technical and Farm schools/institutes with a total intake of 3,340 by 2000. At the same level, following national curricula, there are 187 registered private institutions. Industrial training is delivered by 4 public Vocational Training Institutes and some 400 private training providers. Both of these streams, in particular the former, have attracted criticism for being too academic⁵.

The challenges facing war-affected populations include the physical, psychological, social and economic factors. The holistic vocational training needs to be incorporated into a holistic recovery programme in post conflict northern Uganda. This approach to vocational training would actually consist of two dimensions. First, vocational training programming would be designed with what might be called “horizontal” structures, thus imbedding such important aspects as psychological counseling, occupational therapy, and programming geared towards the larger community to support reintegration. Secondly, TVET programming ought to incorporate “vertical” structures, related to long-term livelihood development. Thus TVET would be seen as one step in a progressive process that includes community-based labour market information systems and vocational counseling, upstream, and job placements, micro-credit projects and general economic integration, downstream.

On top of that, the vocational training system and practices have many challenges in northern Uganda.

Some of these are:

1. Skill Development - Challenges

- Acute shortage of market oriented skill development infrastructure
- Poor bankability of the skills due to poor training, resulting in low employability of trainees.
- Disconnect between skills provided and skills required by the industry.
- Outdated training modules and inadequate courses, equipment, tools & technology.
- Skill demands of the emerging sectors remains largely unmet.
- Severe shortage of trained instructors; and
- Weak industry-institute interface

2. Factor preventing in meeting the challenges

- Best practices in vocational training for substantial expansion of quality for raising employability and productivity

The majority of vocational training programmes in northern Uganda are not measured based on student achievement based on job placement rates. Vocational training programme must be based on “demand driven” training. As a result, the vocational training to youth in post-conflict area become more effective and result oriented. Some of the unaddressed elements in vocational training in northern Uganda have been identified as follows:

- Effective by offering meaningful, quality skills to avoid time-serving and irrelevant training.
- Efficient and competitive “to counter supply-driven training tendencies”.

³ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA), 2006.

⁴ Education Desk-UBOS 2005

⁵ Uganda's National Action Plan on Youth, which emphasizes apprenticeship schemes over formal state provision of training (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2002).

- Flexible and responsive training programmes as required in post-conflict environments.
- Lack of priority management capability, standardized curriculum and resources and implementation in a cost-effective way.

In order to address the above issues, there are a number of best practices that can be followed and implemented in the post conflict environment for improved results. Some of the potential best practices in vocational training in post conflict northern Uganda are:

- Practice1: Programmes are successful that have a clear mission and goals
- Practice2: Vocational programmes are highly effective when organisation is purposeful, effective and sustainable
- Practice3: Programmes generate targeted outcomes if they have proper result based annual plans.
- Practice4: Programmes that are focused to labour market are more effective.
- Practice5: Skills development programmes that accommodate appropriate youth development principles have more positive results
- Practice6: Curriculum linked-to and updated periodically with labour market delivers effective results.
- Practice7: Instructors knowledgeable with curriculum delivery with labour market orientation are more effective in higher job placement.
- Practice8: Quality and programme oriented staff delivers more results
- Practice9: Structured learning programmes that integrate on-the-job & off-the-job training to industry requirements have high impact in all labour market environments
- Practice10: Placements are most successful when each party is aware of their responsibilities and requirements prior to commencement – and when there is ongoing open and honest communication between all parties for the duration of the placement.
- Practice11: Proper monitoring and evaluation in place is more effective for checks and balances in vocational education and training.
- Practice12: Targeted interventions have better results
- Practice13: Financial incentives to trainees is also effective
- Practice14: A proactive management within the training centre actively drives continuous improvement
- Practice15: Documentation of competencies

developed provide more opportunities for placements

Practice16: Continuous improvement strategies help to achieve centre of excellence of the institution

Northern Uganda Youth Development Centre and Vocational training programme

The Northern Uganda Youth Development Centre (NUYDC) is an initiative by the government of Uganda to empower young people from Northern Uganda who have been greatly affected by the 20 year conflict in the region. Republic of Uganda requested the help of the Commonwealth to accommodate the needs of the youth, who have missed out on education and have no marketable skills to offer to the job market. The Commonwealth contributed a total of 500,000 sterling pounds (GBP) for three years. The Department for International Development of UK (DFID) approved funding support to the NUYDC for five years after the end of the Commonwealth assistance in 2010.

Department for International Development, United Kingdom (DFID, U. K) plans to invest £12.15 in Youth Development Programme (YDP) component in northern Uganda and has estimated to generate 500 jobs per annum, amounting to 2,500 jobs over the project's five year period with an annual benefit of £1.1million from training of the youth. There are other areas that will generate benefits such as short term training programmes, post training programmes, and return from capital investment over the years that are directly related to poverty reduction. The project estimates that direct benefits of £24 million at present value (NPV) at the discounted rate of 12 per cent had been identified. Moreover, adjustment of internally displaced youth in employment may generate even higher indirect benefits in the form of peace dividend to the tune of almost 2.3 times of investment.

The project has projected the following impact:

Output Indicator 3.3	Baseline 2009	Milestone 2011	Milestone 2012	Target 2015
Number of youth trained by DFID-funded programmes in targeted vocational and micro-enterprise skills	0	10,000 (>3,000F)	30,000 (>9,000F)	100,000 (>30,000F)

Source: NUYDP Project document, 2010

Impact of vocational training best practices on expected results

The outcomes of best practices have expected increased competitiveness and improved employment opportunities for vocational school graduates in northern Uganda. The outcome has improved quality and relevance, expanded access, and greater efficiency in vocational training. This outcome has been achieved through a turnaround in training management practices using a business approach; a better teaching and learning environment resulting from improved facilities, equipment, and teaching skills; more relevant and up-to-date teaching and learning methodologies; a strong focus on entrepreneurship; and more efficient use of resources. A broader role for vocational institutions has been upgraded, recertified graduates and other workers.

The implementation of best practices have increased productivity required to achieve 8% return on investment, a standard return on investment in vocational training, over 10 years. The economic costs are taken as the financial costs net of price increases and taxes. The quantifiable benefit of the investment is the marginal productivity increase expressed in terms of wages accruing from working graduates from the higher quality training obtained from the various training providers. The number of male and female working graduates is also taken into consideration. The number of working graduates is the estimated number of project graduates, their expected labour force participation rate and unemployment rate is taken from the past statistics, labour market surveys conducted by various organisations and the National Labour Market Survey. Therefore, the marginal increase in average earnings accruing to a vocational graduate over a non-skilled graduate is counted toward the vocational training benefits and the positive effect of best practices..

Under the general scenario described, the implementation of vocational best practices were able to increase the monthly wage to achieve a 8% economic rate of return of 14,400 Uganda Shilling (UGX) or \$5.87 per working graduate per day (the average vocational trainer's earning is less than \$5 per day in northern Uganda). This is equivalent to 6.9% of the current median wage or 15 minutes of additional effort (productivity) per workday resulted from the best practices. Three alternative scenarios were used: (i) main scenario (ii) a 10% increase in capital and recurrent costs, and (iii) a 10% decrease in benefits. The increase in productivity was feasible due to enhanced skills developed among trainees and the certification of their skills earned. The implementation of best practices has enabled training providers to produce consistently higher quality graduates with greater

capacity to learn new skills because of market linked curriculum, technology, occupational and workplace skills, market driven workshops etc. While labor force surveys do not track returns to quality, anecdotal evidence from training institutes in Northern Uganda, employers, and parents indicated that graduates from quality institutes have enjoyed the wage premiums of 25% the median wage. The 8% rate of return has been achieved, with a 25% wage premium equivalent to an 8% economic rate of return because of higher productivity of skills as a result of best practices implementation. In addition to sustainable jobs, all vocational trainees accessed to jobs due to the inputs of other skills such as literacy and numeracy allowed them to access higher quality employment with higher wages or earnings. The bulk of the quantifiable benefits accrue to working graduates from the training providers of the region.

Impact of Vocational Training Best Practices: Marginal Increase in Monthly Wages and Earnings: With an 8% Economic Rate of Return under Various Scenarios

Item	Main Scenario	10% Capital Cost Increase	10% Benefit Decrease
Required increase	UGX 18000.0	12000	14400
Percent of median wage			

Source: Author's estimates.

If one project outputs include 100,000 vocational trainees (it is assumed that all trainees participating in any level of programme will have an opportunity to get job) male and female working graduates generating one million work-years (100,000x10years) between year 5 and year 10 after the completion of their training. The net increase in productivity of these graduates at a conservative 8% economic rate of return is equivalent to 15 minutes of additional productivity per worker per day worked. The marginal productivity (15 minutes per worker per day) gain with 8% economic rate of return is equivalent to an additional one million work years.

Distribution of benefits

There are other benefits from the implementation of best practices in gender, outreach because of practices on network of training providers, enrolment, etc. Firstly, affordability and expected returns influenced choice of institute and distribution of benefits. Formal education is more expensive than vocational training in Uganda and almost beyond the capacity of majority of youth in northern Uganda. Because of this reason, greater access resulting from expansion of the training facility through training providers in the whole Northern Uganda have led to

an increase in the proportion of youth from poor households of up-country districts to towns. Location plays a large role in determining participation in vocational training including vocational institutes. Town students have better access to vocational institutes and better institutes compared to rural students based on training provider analysis. Gender enrollment by vocational programmes reflected labor market gender segmentation due to the prioritisation of gender based vocational programmes. Male students were concentrated in industry-oriented programmes, while female students were concentrated in services-oriented programmes in Northern Uganda, hence, the training providers have focused to rationalise project benefits. On the other hand, training providers were skewed toward technical programmes; as a result, the participation of males was higher than for females in Northern Uganda.

Key impact on northern Uganda future economy, employment and income from international best practices:

- Capacity enhancement in best practices to training providers have created an upgrading and efficiency gains increased annual trainees intake from 100,000 to 125, 000 trainees. Forty percent of the students will be girls. Nearly half of the trainees will be from conflict affected poor and low-income families.
- Best practices on leadership, business planning, finance, and management training have resulted an increased efficiency and training quality.
- Over 5 years of project period, the best practices will equip graduates with relevant industry skills, greater capacity to adapt to changing technology, and higher productivity resulting in greater earning potential. The additional worker productivity generated by the Project is estimated to be 52083 person-years (15x365x100000x5), boosting northern Uganda's agricultural, industrial and market competitiveness and reducing poverty.
- Entrepreneur development and business training linking to Private Sector Foundation, a DFID funded job creation programme will help new graduates establish viable enterprises. Enhanced industry partnerships will yield more work-study placements, shorter job search time and reduced employment mismatch.

Conclusion

Empirical experiences show that vocational training with the implementation of best practices plays a large role in creating improved employment opportunities for local economic growth and social development in post conflict regions. In general,

vocational training with (i) trained human resources to the labour market and (ii) skills to those looking for employment starting from literacy, core skills, vocational skills and post training programmes ; are more effective for improved results.

The implementation of best practices provides a strategic framework for the development of vocational training policies to address the unemployment challenges to support economic development and the creation of national wealth and contribute to poverty eradication. The best practices addresses the cross-cutting issues of employability, relevance, collaboration between training institutions and employers, accreditation of training providers, assessment, certification and quality assurance of training programmes.

The best practices presents vocational training providers a valid license to cater for trainees confirming that they are not only eligible but also capable in creating a well-paid job or self-employment opportunity fit only for youth who have been affected by conflict, school drop-out, early school leavers, people who missed school, etc. Moreover, the best practices are competency-based and employment led, with proficiency testing as proof of competence but on top of that with more productivity than regular vocational trainees.

Finally, the vocational training best practices acknowledge that it alone does not provide jobs or wage premium in the labour market. The best practices strategy therefore urges all vocational training practitioners to create an enabling training environment that promotes the growth of skills development and stimulates the link to the labour market. When businesses develop and expand, additional labour-market demands for vocational training emerge, new job opportunities are created, more people get employed, and the incidence of poverty reduces. For this to happen on a sustainable basis, the vocational training system is highly useful if vocational training are implemented based on vocational best practices that are labour-market relevant, equitable, efficient, and of high quality.

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